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DAVID LEWIS, CNN **Special Assignment:** In the United States of America, there is a hidden government about which you know nothing.

TOM GOLDEN, Chief of Central Intelligence, Strategic Defense Command:It was the most highly classified, and the largest program of its type, that I had ever become involved in.

LEWIS: In the United States Federal Government, there is a super-secret agency which controls this shadow government. Its name is so secret, it has never been made public before this broadcast. The federal agency directing the hidden government is so classified that most of the United States elected officials are unaware of its existence.

WILLIAM ARKIN, Nuclear Weapons Expert: If you go to members of Congress, if you go to key staffers on armed services or the intelligence committees, and you ask them about the Continuity of Government - COG - program, they often look at you with a blank face.

Mr. GOLDEN: That particular program, without going into all of the details, was completely immune from oversight. There was no oversight, period.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Within this hidden government program, there are charges of fraud, abuse, cover-up, which have never reached the public, until now.

'BOB': In covering up errors, mistakes, inefficiency and protecting one's own position, the program was jeopardized.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Within the hidden government, there is a secret plan which could make an unelected official, outside the legal line of succession, president of the United States, if a nuclear war begins.

'RALPH': These individuals would have the right to appoint, virtually appoint, a new government.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Tonight, the results of CNN's year-long investigation into the Doomsday Government.

[Commercial break]

LEWIS: This is all that you might ever see of some of the United States' most secret, most expensive and most important government programs. Beyond these warning barriers, there is a secret world, only hinted at in the press. It's a world of spy satellites, giant eavesdropping antennas, secret weapons programs. Yet further, beyond the government's barriers, there is an even more hidden world, a world of secret programs about which virtually nothing is publicly known. They're called 'special access' or 'black' programs, because no light is allowed to shine in and reveal them to the world. Of all the black programs, almost none is blacker, or more hidden than COG - Continuity of Government.

It is our government's plan to make sure it survives a nuclear attack. Its nickname is the Doomsday Program. The

secret Continuity of Government programs are managed by a super-secret agency, known as the NPO, or National Program Office. Its name has never been made public before this report. Special Assignment began investigating COG and the NPO because of rumored abuses within these secret operations.

The secrecy was mandated by COG's awesome mission: to ensure the survival of a civilian constitutional government, in the event of nuclear war, and to ensure that civilians can keep control over the U.S. military's retaliation to any attack.

The basic Continuity of Government plan calls for the evacuation of key government officials to hidden bunkers, scattered around the United States.

Rep. LEE HAMILTON, (D-IN): The Continuity of Government program protects the political leadership of the United States.

LEWIS: In the event of a national emergency, COG also provides support for a presidential successor if the president is killed. This part of the program, also never reported on before now, is called the Presidential Successor Support System. It is operated by the NPO. The doomsday planning for U.S. leaders covers virtually every eventuality:

Rep. HAMILTON: How they get out of town, where they go, what kind of communications equipment they have, how they could run the government, how they could function.

LEWIS: Mobility is central to the plan. Mobile command centers, convoys of huge trucks similar to this one, would roam the countryside, hiding, dodging, heading eventually for secret, protected sites.

'ADAM': The mobile aspect is to be able to move from certain, designated locations to other areas that have been preselected for the survivability of the leadership.

LEWIS: To enable the leadership to govern for months after attack, the mobile centers in the protected bunkers, similar to this one, house vast communications systems and supplies.

'ADAM': Food, medicine, water purification, clothing, what it needs to support a small city for six months plus.

LEWIS: This confidential source, who we call 'Adam,' worked for the National Program Office. This source, we call him 'Bob,' also worked for the NPO.

'BOB': The organization of the structure is very complex, very far-reaching.

LEWIS: 'Bob' and 'Adam' insisted that we alter their names, faces and voices, because they feared the government would retaliate against them for talking about the NPO's mission.

'BOB': It ranges from the White House, the presidency itself, down through all of the active organizations which make our government function.

LEWIS: Ronald Reagan authorized the National Program Office when he signed a top-secret directive in 1982. Oliver North was one of the key officers responsible for the program's start-up. Under the NPO's direction, four agencies were charged with execution of the doomsday plan: the CIA, the Departments of State and Defense, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (**FEMA**).

BRUCE BLAIR, Brookings Institution: An effort was being made to consolidate Continuity of Government programs across several major departments of the government under one office, which turned out later to be called the National Program Office.

LEWIS: Bruce Blair is the only person we found who would openly confirm the NPO's existence. He was hired by the program in 1985, but left before he received his security clearances, or worked on specific projects.

Mr. BLAIR: As I understood it, this office fell under the jurisdiction of the office of the Vice President.

LEWIS: Then-Vice President George Bush was the first in charge. Today, Vice President Dan Quayle heads the program. It is overseen directly by the White House because of its fundamental mission, to make sure that constitutional government survives Armageddon.

'BOB': It's a necessity, not just a good concept. It's the responsibility of the presidency of the United States, to have something to ensure the people of this country that their system is going to continue.

LEWIS: 'Bob,' and other sources, believe deeply in the NPO's mission, but they fear its doomsday plan simply won't work. They say it is so hidden from normal government oversight, so insulated, so protected, that problems don't come to light and malfunctions are not corrected. They say this lack of oversight leads to fraud and abuse. Our investigation found those concerns to be justified, but our most disturbing finding is that the communications system at the heart of the program may be gravely flawed.

Sources tell CNN as much as $ 8 billion has been spent on the NPO since 1982, much of it on high-tech, nuclear-resistant communications gear. To build this post-nuclear communications system, the Federal Emergency Management Agency hired the Harris Corporation; the CIA hired McDonnell-Douglas; Defense hired TRW. The State Department used government equipment, but incredibly, multiple sources say that the individual agency systems were technically incompatible. In other words, they couldn't talk to each other.

'ADAM': Equipment didn't work. System A wouldn't integrate with system B, but system B was critical to interface with system C, and none of it interfaced.

'BOB': It was like, 'So what? We'll catch up with it later,' but later never came.

LEWIS: Our sources told us that the NPO's immunity from oversight allowed its problems to spiral so out of control, that an outrageous fraud was perpetrated by the NPO, on the very senators and congressmen who were authorizing taxpayer money to pay for the program.

It happened at a secret site near Great Falls, Montana. Sources say that in late 1985, then-Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill and Senate Appropriations Chairman Robert Byrd were among key officials who participated in the first major test of the new communications system. NPO officials were afraid the system would fail in front of their powerful guests, so they rigged the test. 'Bob' was an eyewitness.

'BOB': At one point, information was supposed to be sent out, and even though lights were blinking and the wheels were turning, the message was being sent by pay phone, about a block and a half from the site where the exercise was taking place.

LEWIS: [interviewing] So, x-million dollars worth of communications equipment later, they had to use a pay phone to make it work?

'BOB': That's what happened. Millions of dollars worth of equipment failed to function correctly, and 25 or 50 cents worth of change in a pay telephone got the message through.

LEWIS: The test appeared to be a success, but the officials had been hoodwinked, and money continued to flow into the program. Very few people knew about the scam, and because the program is so classified, there was no one they could tell.

LEWIS: [interviewing] We're aware that communications tests of this program were falsified. Can you comment on that?

Mr. GOLDEN: I can't comment, other than to say that I do believe that Congress was misled by senior-level people in the program. In fact, I'm convinced of it.

LEWIS: [voice-over] It took the Pentagon a year to let Tom Golden talk to CNN about his work. We have learned

[that] he'd worked for the National Program Office at the time of the phony test. He refused to confirm that, or talk about anything classified.

Mr. GOLDEN: In this particular program, investigators for the most part were never permitted to have access, so they really couldn't conduct any type of a thorough investigation.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Sources tell CNN that, as recently as last December, five years after the phony test, the different agencies involved in the COG network still couldn't communicate, effectively rendering the crucial, multibillion-dollar Presidential Successor Support System nearly useless.

'BOB': The authority vested in some people within the program was abused. The end result is the entire system becomes vulnerable. When this country may need it, at that most critical time, then that would be the time for nuclear attack.

LEWIS: [interviewing] How does that make you feel?

'BOB': Sad, pathetic, and it makes a person very angry.

LEWIS: The White House, and the four agencies that are part of the NPO's plan, refused to speak with us about this story. There have been two secret Congressional investigations of problems in the NPO, but those committees wouldn't speak either; nor would any of the other agencies looking into the program.

Next, a falsified test, security problems, and a cover-up in the doomsday program.

[Commercial break]

LEWIS: COG - Continuity of Government - our government's doomsday plan to ensure the survival of the nation's leadership in the event of nuclear war. NPO - the National Program Office - the vast agency which manages the most secret parts of this doomsday program.

NPO is an operation so secret, its name has never been revealed before Special Assignment reported on it and its gravely flawed communications system. But the problems of the NPO and the doomsday plan do not end there. Our investigation reveals that, within the program - more classified, more insulated from normal government oversight than most other secret programs - there were problems with contracts, breaches in security, and finally, a cover-up.

First, contract irregularities. CNN obtained 1988 correspondence between House Armed Services Committee Chairman Les Aspin and then-Secretary of the Army John Marsh. In his letter, Aspin asked about a highly classified program involving the Army and a whistleblower, who reported apparently illegal contracts and was retaliated against.

Concern about these particular abuses led to a Congressional review and four separate investigations by the Army. CNN learned that the highly classified program was indeed the supersecret National Program Office. The man who blew the whistle was intelligence veteran Tom Golden.

Mr. GOLDEN: They can get away with things that they would not be able to get away with in any other situation.

LEWIS: [interviewing] This is the program run by the National Program Office?

Mr. GOLDEN: That's classified, and I can't discuss that at all.

LEWIS: [voice-over] He spoke only about the problems of an unnamed program.

Mr. GOLDEN: There were contract irregularities. Contracts had been awarded illegally.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Congressional investigators determined that several contracts were issued for work that should have been performed by the government itself. In fact, the investigation by Aspin's committee revealed that almost

all of the Army contracts for the NPO were issued without competitive bidding. Although this latter practice is legal, these sole-source contracts are discouraged under the law.

Beyond the contract irregularities, Special Assignment has uncovered another disturbing problem in the doomsday program - the fact that the National Program Office's extraordinary security was used to hide embarrassing problems. Bob used to work inside the NPO.

'BOB': In some instances, security was used to cover up administrative, financial, operational mistakes; to keep it in house, to keep it limited, so it wouldn't injure careers.

LEWIS: In one of those cases of abuse in the doomsday program, the NPO's top security officer allegedly attempted to cover up a stunning security failure. The attempted cover-up was of an embarrassing, secret, 1983 report. CNN was able to read part of the report, which was written up after military intelligence reviewed security at NPO offices in Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and found it lacking.

The team conducting the review discovered that documents that should have been classified had been thrown in the trash. Security experts told CNN that if Soviet spies had retrieved the discarded documents, they could have learned enough about the doomsday program to defeat it. Beyond the security lapse itself is the fact that the report revealing these embarrassing lapses was apparently ordered destroyed. It happened this way. A copy of the report detailing the security lapses was sent to the senior NPO official at Fort Huachuca, then-Colonel Eugene Renzi. The aide who sent the report wrote this accompanying memo that calls the report a bomb, and says, 'The entire program has been compromised.' He further warns, 'If this gets out, the program is dead.' Most shocking, the memo says the NPO security director, John Hartford, has ordered all copies be destroyed. In other words, cover up the evidence of security failure in the doomsday plan.

At least one copy of the report, and the accompanying memo, survived. It's the one we read. But our sources say virtually all other copies of the report were destroyed, and apparently, the cover-up worked. The report was not passed on to top program directors.

Our sources feared that the problems and abuses of the doomsday program have weakened it; and they also fear that if nuclear war comes, the program simply won't work.

'BOB': We would field this system, thinking it was secure, and it would not be. In covering up errors, mistakes, inefficiency and protecting one's own position, the program was jeopardized- was placed in jeopardy.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Many of the sources familiar with the doomsday program blame its problems on inadequate government oversight.

Mr. GOLDEN: It was basically exempt from any oversight, and I think that really caused the problems to occur. There was no one looking from the outside.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Our year-long investigation suggests that the problems within the doomsday program are also found in other top-secret, special access programs. The number of these hidden, protected programs exploded during the 1980's.

In the last 10 years, the budget for secret programs has grown 800 percent. Now more than one-tenth of the Pentagon's annual budget is spent on them. That's about $ 36 billion a year.

By law, Congress oversees the special access or black budget, and has watched with alarm as the number of programs has swollen. A selective few members and investigators actually probe inside the operations of secret programs. Although they keep silent about the classified details, they can be harsh critics.

Rep. HAMILTON: The more secret a program is, the more the potential for abuse.

LEWIS: Lee Hamilton is the former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. Dave McCurdy is the current chairman.

Rep. DAVE McCURDY, (D-OK): I don't think there's any question that there needs to be more oversight in special access programs. There has been a tendency over the past decade to place programs in there in order to just limit access for either political or managerial reasons.

LEWIS: [voice-over] Frank Conahan scrutinizes black programs for Congress. He also says they're susceptible to abuse.

FRANK CONAHAN, General Accounting Office: I find cases where information is classified, and I can find no reason that that piece of information is classified, except that it is a criticism of the program.

BRUCE FEIN, Attorney: It's very difficult to give credence to the allegations that somehow a covert or a black code program is more susceptible to abuse than other kinds of programs.

LEWIS: [voice-over] On the other side of the black program debate, conservative legal scholar Bruce Fein. He argues that national security justifies strict secrecy.

Mr. FEIN: Without any direct oversight of some operation, there may be some abuse, but you have to also ask of the trade-offs. Because without secrecy, many programs essential to the security of the United States won't occur at all.

LEWIS: [voice-over] In CNN's year-long investigation, most of the people we talked to familiar with secret programs like the National Program Office, both people who work in these programs, and those charged with watching over them, argue that in our open society there needs to be a better balance between secrecy and oversight; a middle ground where security is not compromised, but where fraud, waste and abuse are exposed, not hidden away or covered up.

The argument is old: national security versus the rights of citizens to know how well their money is being spent.

Next, two who challenged the powerful doomsday program and paid the price.

[Commercial break]

LEWIS: In Washington, in other hidden sites around the nation, there is a world so secret, insiders call it black because no light shines in to reveal what is hidden there. A world of super-secret defense and intelligence programs - black programs. Hundreds of thousands of people work in this shadowy world, pass their lives in black programs. They say they are inside the bubble. They almost never talk with outsiders or journalists or investigators because black program regulations forbid it. We've been investigating one of the most secret of all the black programs. It's at the heart of a plan called Continuity of Government, a plan to protect the United States leadership in case of a nuclear attack or other national security emergency. From deep within this program, in a White House-managed National Program Office, which runs its most secret parts, people came forward to talk to us; some risked prosecution. But they were concerned about abuses of the power given to black programs. Two people who talked to us had already challenged the powerful National Program Office and suffered the consequences. Because in black programs, whistleblowers come forward at their own peril.

'BOB': They're always at risk; that if they're inside the bubble and they determine there is a problem, fraud, waste, abuse, whatever, if they go outside the bubble, they can be prosecuted for violation of the security regulations.

LEWIS: Tom Golden blew the whistle on two black program.

Mr. GOLDEN: There are good reasons to have the programs, but I think sometimes they are abused by the people in the program simply because they can.

LEWIS: In 1983, Golden risked his career to report wrongdoing in his secret military unit code-named Yellow Fruit. The result: court martials; prison terms for army intelligence officials; a review of all army intelligence programs. John Marsh, then-Secretary of the Army, conducted it.

JOHN MARSH: I became impressed with Tom and really had a great deal of respect for him and for what he did, and what I thought individually was a very courageous decision that he took.

LEWIS: In the aftermath of that decision, Golden returned to the anonymity of the black world. He refused to tell us where or what the job involved. But CNN learned that in 1984 he went to work for the super-secret NPO, the National Program Office. His crucial mission is planning for the survival of the United States government after a nuclear attack.

Mr. GOLDEN: It was a very large program and the most highly classified program that I had personally ever heard of or ever worked on.

LEWIS: In 1987, Golden was approached by Congressional investigators about reported abuses within the program.

Mr. GOLDEN: I either had to lie or tell the truth. There was not an option of not saying anything.

LEWIS: Golden told the investigators what he knew.

Mr. GOLDEN: Contracts had been awarded illegally. There were other problems involving a conflict of interest with a senior-level member of the program.

LEWIS: Once again, Golden's decision to cooperate with investigators had serious consequences. The illegal contracts were canceled, and a brigadier general was reprimanded. But, this time, government retaliation against Golden was swift.

Mr. GOLDEN: There were at least four investigations that were conducted on myself that I'm aware of. There could have been more.

LEWIS: Federal agents went door to door in his Arizona neighborhood, telling Golden's neighbors they were investigating allegations of drinking and other personal behavior.

Mr. GOLDEN: It leads people to believe that you're in trouble, and it damages your credibility. It damages your standing in the intelligence community. It really boils down to a smear campaign.

LEWIS: And then the government abolished his job.

Mr. GOLDEN: It cost myself and my family three years of living in absolute hell. My family paid a high price.

LEWIS: But you would do it again?

Mr. GOLDEN: Probably.

LEWIS: In a review of the case, both the House Armed Services Committee and the Army Inspector General's office concluded that Tom Golden had been retaliated against.

Mr. GOLDEN: The Army couldn't even stop what was going on.

LEWIS: So clearly, then, it was somebody higher than the Army.

Mr. GOLDEN: It was a program that the Army did not have jurisdiction over.

LEWIS: Tom Golden has survived his long struggle with the super-secret National Program Office, survived the investigations and the harassment. But Fred Westerman is not surviving his challenge to the giant Doomsday Program. It has cost him his work, his savings, and his reputation. Westerman was a 20-year veteran military intelligence agent, who retired to start a security company.

FRED WESTERMAN: I provided a series of security services to the government. I provided services to the Corps

of Engineers on a classified contract, which I cannot go into detail.

LEWIS: Although Westerman refused to talk about anything classified, CNN learned that his contract involved setting up hidden storage facilities for the super-secret NPO. Two years later, in 1987, his contract was canceled. Westerman says it was because he tried to point out security problems and other irregularities in the Doomsday Program. To recover his costs, Westerman sued the government. Once again, retaliation was swift. In November 1988, the justice department began a criminal investigation of him for allegedly trying to defraud the government on his contract. Once Westerman was under criminal investigation, his own lawsuit was frozen. And last year, when federal investigators told his new boss Westerman was about to be indicted, he lost his job on another classified program, and he lost his security clearances as well. And today, he cannot find work in his profession. He is hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt.

DAVID MANN, Security Consultant: I think what's happening to him, truthfully, is that the federal attorneys, and whoever is driving them to do their job, are attempting to ruin the man through legal means.

LEWIS: David Mann served with Fred Westerman, and has known him for 25 years. Like Westerman, most of his life was in military intelligence.

Mr. MANN: It's a type of modern McCarthyism, if you will, and it's federal attorneys attempting to badger him, and attempting to create some court case out of smoke and mirrors or whatever.

Mr. WESTERMAN: What assets I did have have either been sold off or have been mortgaged to the hilt and, quite honestly, I am in financial disrepair. I am unemployable in the profession that I know best.

LEWIS: For three years, Fred Westerman has been caught in an intelligence twilight zone, unable to clear his name, unable to resolve his legal cases. Today, he is still mired in the Justice Department's investigation, caught like Tom Golden in a seemingly unwinnable struggle with the powerful secret National Program Office. The law limits the rights of any individual suing a classified program or being investigated by one. On occasion, national security comes before individual rights, particularly when the classified program is one like the NPO, that involves the presidency and the survival of our government. The cases of Tom Golden and Fred Westerman present the questions, when are the rights of U.S. citizens less important than national security? and, how can we ensure that words 'national security' will not, as we reported earlier, be used against individuals who try to report fraud and wrongdoing in secret programs? Next, a secret Doomsday Plan which could make an unelected official outside the legal line of succession president of the United States.

[Commercial break]

[clip of Kennedy assasination]

LEWIS: The assasination of a president - perhaps the most traumatic blow that can strike the people of the United States and their government. In the agony and uncertainty of national upheaval, nothing is more vital to the continuity of the United States government than the provision that if a president should die, a constitutionally designated successor is ready to take power.

The Constitution of the United States and other supporting laws clearly spell out the line of presidential succession so that no matter what happens there will always be a continuity in leadership. If a president is killed, the vice president succeeds him. He would be followed by Congressional officers - the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tem of the Senate. Next would come the cabinet secretaries.

But in our year-long investigations, Special Assignment has learned that the National Program Office, the hidden bureaucracy that manages the most secret parts of these Continuity of Government plans has created another top-secret succession plan, which is completely unknown to the people of the United States and known to only a few in government. To guarantee the continuity of government in event of nuclear war, this plan expands the list of presidential successors. Multiple sources have told CNN that in certain narrowly defined circumstances, an individual not in the legal line of succession or even in government could become president, despite the fact that the American people had no role in selecting that person.

The hidden government plan is a result of four decades of nuclear escalation, four decades of threat and counterthreat. In the 1980's, Continuity of Government planners were haunted by a grim possibility: a nuclear wartime scenario called decapitation; a surprise nuclear strike on Washington that kills most of the country's leaders, chopping the head off the government, leaving no one prepared to take over the presidency. To reduce the possibility of decapitation, the National Program Office was directed to create a new program to assure the continuity of government. It was known as the Presidential Successor Support System, or PS-cubed. The NPO specifically designed the new presidential successor program to ensure that there will be enough experienced leaders ready to take over key jobs in the executive branch after a nuclear war. So additional successors, beyond those provided for by the Constitution and by U.S. laws, were added to the list of potential presidents. The Presidential Successor Support System's rationale: that [in order] to protect the United States' unique constitutional form of government from the ultimate threat, it is necessary to have this alternate system of succession. But, ironically, the new system, as it is now operating, could dramatically alter the established rules of succession.

'RALPH': The program itself would suspend that natural succession and these individuals would have the right to appoint- virtually appoint, a new government.

LEWIS: 'Ralph' is a source who knows the details of much of the NPO's succession plans. He and our other sources knowledgeable about the NPO, like 'Bob', would talk on camera only if their names, faces, and voices were changed.

'BOB': In some cases, it may be necessary to even go outside of the active current government to bring in that expertise in a period of crisis.

LEWIS: So in the event of nuclear war, it's hypothetically possible that someone outside the government could become a cabinet officer, vice president, or even president?

'BOB': Hypothetically speaking, it could happen anywhere in the chain of government. Yes, it most certainly could.

LEWIS: The Presidential Successor Support System, a secret government in waiting if a nuclear war comes. CNN Special Assignment has learned the names of a number of former government officials who, sources tell us, have at one time or another been part of the NPO PS-cubed program. In the event of disaster, one of them could become president. Howard Baker, former senator and White House Chief of Staff, never before in the line of succession. Richard Helms, the former director of the CIA, never before in the line of succession. Jean Kirkpatrick, the former ambassador to the United Nations, never before in the line of succession until called on by the NPO. Former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, in the line of succession, but before the NPO was set up. Dick Cheney, Edmund Meese, Tip O'Neill, and Dick Thornburgh, all have been in the line of succession by virtue of their offices, but our sources say the NPO gave them additional responsibilities under the new system. None of these officials would talk to us on the record about their role in NPO's plans. But some program insiders defend the alternate plan of succession.

'BOB': Remember, we're talking about the final circumstances. I don't think there would be any option to that. How can we predict who will survive? It can't be done. So, we have to go on the premise that we have enough alternates, knowledgeable people in enough locations to do the job.

LEWIS: On the other side of the debate, critics say that the hidden government plan is so extreme that, ironically, it violates the very constitution it is designed to protect. One high-level government official familiar with the plans told us, 'When you compare this plan with the Constitution, the two don't match up.' This same official says the plan could put the American system of checks and balances in the deep-freeze. Directly or indirectly, the checks and balances between Congress and the White House - in fact, all the laws of the United States - are based on the U.S. Constitution. Today, constitutional scholars and students of nuclear war debate whether a document written more than a hundred years before the existence of electricity can address the new scientific and technical realities.

Mr. ARKIN: Is there such a tension between the rapidity of a nuclear war, between the fact that a nuclear war could happen in 30 minutes, and the way in which our government is structured and our Constitution is written that makes the two at odds forever.

LEWIS: William Arkin is a leading authority on nuclear command and control issues, as well as Continuity of Government, COG programs.

Mr. ARKIN: And what I've come to discover in looking at the COG program is that the tension cannot be resolved; that as long as we have nuclear weapons, we're going to have to fudge on the Constitution.

LEWIS: Professor William Van Alstyne, a leading constitutional scholar, says the need for designated leadership in a post-nuclear world must be acknowledged.

WILLIAM VAN ALSTYNE, Duke University Law School: We're now talking about a situation where the Presidential Succession Act itself proves to provide too short a list.

LEWIS: It is the secrecy of the NPO's new succession plan which makes it vulnerable and unworkable, says Van Alstyne. Because if one of the alternate successors outside the government did become president, no one would believe it.

Prof. VAN ALSTYNE: Obviously, what is wrong with it is that if no one knows in advance what the line of succession is meant to be, then almost by hypothesis, no one will have any reason to believe that those who claim to be exercising that authority, in fact, possess it.

LEWIS: Today, the rush of history is making the likelihood of the Doomsday Plan ever being activated and the likelihood of the alternate successors becoming president more remote. The great cold-war struggle is finally ending, and the future of Earth seems safer.

But planning for the unexpected continues, as new fears replace the old: fears of nuclear proliferation; of terrorists obtaining the bomb; of continuing instability in the Soviet Union. All are reasons why programs like those run by the National Program Office will continue and continue to try and hide their activities behind a veil of secrecy.

In our examination of the Doomsday Program, we have shown how, in the name of national security, the National Program Office, a classified program with a legitimate mission, overstepped its authority, committed fraud, covered up abuses, avoided oversight, and retaliated against people who challenged its power. It's a particularly egregious example of abuse of the public trust, but it's not the only one. The problems discovered in the National Program Office, helped launch a Congressional drive to exercise effective oversight over black programs. But our examination indicates that until there are stronger checks and balances on this secret world, abuses will continue. I'm David Lewis, CNN Special Assignment.

The preceding text has been professionally transcribed. However, although the text has been checked against an audio track, in order to meet rigid distribution and transmission deadlines, it has not yet been proofread against videotape.

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